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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 005068

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/20/2015

TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: UIC 555 LEADERS REACT TO ELECTIONS

REF: BAGHDAD 1309

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT S. FORD FOR  
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In a December 14 interview, Sadr City District Advisory Council (DAC) member Ali Suadi told PolOff that in Sadr City confidence in Coalition Forces (CF) is low. The Sadr militia, he claimed, openly patrols in Sadr City in black uniforms and guns; the Iraqi police make no effort to confront them. He recommended that Coalition Forces strive to disarm militias while also implementing another weapons buy-back program. If the militias disappear from Sadr City then rule of law could be restored, he asserted. Including Sadrists in the UIC 555 coalition was a mistake, according to Suadi, who believes its participation will ultimately undermine the coalition. END SUMMARY.

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The Coalition's Image Problem  
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[1](#)2. (C) Suadi told PolOff that more and more residents of Sadr City do not trust CF. The Iraqis, according to Suadi, perceive CF raids are ineffective, often targeting the wrong people. Suadi offered his solution to solving the U.S.'s image problem. He suggested that all militias must be dissolved and CF should organize a weapons buy-back program like the one that took place in autumn 2004 (Reftel). Rule of law could then be restored in Sadr City, and the U.S. could take credit for this.

[1](#)3. (C) According to Suadi, the U.S. needs to take credit for its achievements. Muqtada al Sadr, he says, takes credit for many reconstruction projects in Sadr City. Every time he does this, his popularity rises. As a result, many in Sadr City do not mind that his militia, the Jaysh Al Mahdi (JAM), patrols the streets of Sadr City. JAM members carry guns and wear black clothing and the Iraqi Police (IP) is unable to confront them.

[1](#)4. (C) Allowing a militia to control the streets is certainly a bad thing, Suadi said. JAM is responsible for the deaths of many of its opponents. He recounted to PolOff the story of a kindergarten headmaster who was killed on December 10. According to Suadi, JAM kidnapped and held this person for ransom because she had money, wore jewelry, and spoke to U.S. officials. The militia received the 30,000 USD ransom, but killed the headmaster anyway. Incidents like these, in which the perpetrators are not brought to justice, diminish the standing of the Iraqi Government and CF, and make Muqtada al Sadr appear to be a very powerful leader, Suadi said.

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Sadrists Detrimental To UIC 555  
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[1](#)5. (C) Suadi predicted that the UIC 555 coalition will not last long. He said Muqtada al Sadr wants to remake his image to be that of a religious authority like the Marjaiya (the Shia religious establishment). Fielding multiple lists of candidates is proof that Muqtada al Sadr does not fully support UIC 555. Suadi claimed that the reason why the Sadrists were brought into the UIC 555 coalition is to boost SCIRI's low poll ratings in southern Iraq. (Comment: many of our Shia Islamist contacts think SCIRI did not want to compete against Sadrists in southern Iraq. End Comment.) Bringing the Sadrists into the Shia coalition will hurt SCIRI's influence, while simultaneously boosting the Sadrists' credibility. This will put much strain on an already uneasy partnership, Suadi said.

[1](#)6. (C) COMMENT: Ali Suadi is well known to us and is considered an informed contact. His stories of extrajudicial killings by the Mahdi Army parallel reports from other sources and lends credibility to complaints from Allawi and Tawaffuq sources about Mahdi Army interference in the election campaign and vote. Turning to the political arena, Suadi's comments about the instability of the List 555 Shia coalition may be prescient. The UIC 555 coalition started showing signs of strain from the very outset when the Fadhila Party attempted to withdraw from the coalition (many of our sources say Fadhila is now an "unwilling partner"). However, many of our contacts also

anticipated the Shia coalition in the Transitional National Assembly elected in January 2005 would come apart. Instead, that Shia coalition displayed remarkable cohesion.  
KHALILZAD